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Memorandum of Conversations with Soviet Delegates (Khvostov, Talensky,

Tamm and Sissakyan) at Stowe, Vermont, September 13, 14 and 16

From: Henry A. Kissinger

During the Pugwash Conference at Stowe, Vermont, I had an opportunity to talk to a number of Soviet delegates about the Berlin problem. The issue came up in the following context: at the plenary session on Wednesday, September 13, Eugene Rabinowitch made the statement that the American government was conducting nineteenth century politics over Berlin at a moment when such measures were completely insane. As a result, he said, such phrases as "if we are pushed around too much over Berlin we will fight" were sheer bluff and were not taken seriously by any American.

I did not respond to this at the plenary session because the composition of our delegation made it likely that a rejoinder would produce an acrimonious debate within the Western group and thus reinforce Rabinowitch's point. After the meeting, however, I saw Rabinowitch sitting with the whole Russian delegation working on a draft statement for the conference. I asked Robert Bowie to join me in correcting any misapprehension that might have been left by the afternoon session. We joined the group and asked Rabinowitch to explain to our Soviet colleagues that in order to avoid a public clash we had been silent at the plenary session. At the same time, we did not wish them to return to the Soviet Union with any misapprehension about our views. I said that I had seen something of the operation of our government. I could assure them that our threats over Berlin were meant utterly seriously. A Soviet policy based on the assumption that we were bluffing could only lead to disaster.

Rabinowitch at first refused to translate this but a number of the Russians understood English and he was finally prevailed upon to interpret. Khvostov said that my remarks proved the correctness of the Soviet policy of resuming nuclear testing. I said that if the Soviets were prepared unilaterally to interrupt our access to Berlin they were indeed correct in resuming testing, because any interruption of our access would lead to war. However, it seemed to me that my comments could also be construed another way, namely, that the Soviet Union could avoid a clash by negotiating over disputed issues rather than proceeding on the basis of unilateral threats. At this point,

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Topchiev thanked me for the information and I left.

The next day, Thursday, September 14, one of the Soviet interpreters came to me and asked me whether some of the participants from the Soviet Union could speak to me after dinner. I agreed. Present at this meeting were Khvostov, General Talensky, and later on, Sissakyan. These three seemed to me in the plenary sessions the most influential of the Soviet group.

They began by asking me to repeat what I had said the day before. I said that I was not a diplomat and would speak with absolute frankness. They had to understand that I had attended the conference as a private citizen. I had heard a number of them say that they had been misled by the American participants at the Moscow conference about the likely future policy of the Kennedy Administration. I therefore did not want them to leave the Stowe conference with a misapprehension. I had heard many of them speak at the plenary session about the need to recognize facts and to act realistically. It therefore seemed to me that they should recognize one basic fact about American foreign policy: any interruption of our access to Berlin or any threat to the freedom of Berlin would mean war. Nor would we agree to any subterfuge by which the freedom of Berlin would be jeopardized. Khvostov replied that it was illogical to kill tens of millions to protect two million people. I said that it was a waste of time to discuss logic. The only thing that mattered was what we were going to do. The Soviet Union would make a terrible mistake if it assumed that we would proceed on the basis of Khvostov's calculation.

Talensky then gave a long explanation along familiar Soviet lines about revanchism in Western Germany and the fact that Germany would soon dominate NATO. He also argued that the interests of Western Germany were not the interests of the United States and that if it were not for Germany the United States and the Soviet Union could have most excellent relations. I replied that it seemed to me a fruitless approach to attempt to distinguish in this manner between the interests of the United States and our close allies. Talensky had to understand that we could not cooperate with the Soviet attempt to isolate one of our partners. There followed a rather inconclusive discussion of the meaning of self-determination for Germany; the need for a peace treaty, and similar matters on which both sides restated fairly familiar positions.

After about an hour of this, I asked Khvostov whether the only kind of settlement conceivable was one involving the whole German problem. It seemed to me that our positions as expressed during this conversation were almost irreconcilable. Khvostov, seconded by Talensky, said that the thought had crossed his mind whether a settlement of the Berlin issue might not be separated from the German problem as a whole.

I said that whatever the relationship of Adenauer's interests to ours, I could discern a great difference between the interests of Ulbricht and the Soviet Union. It seemed to me that the fruitful line for the Soviet Union to pursue would be not to support Ulbricht's aspirations within Germany but to obtain security guarantees where it could. Khvostov seemed to agree that there was indeed some difference between Ulbricht's interests and those of the Soviet Union. Talensky raised the question of what security guarantees I had in mind.

I said that since the Soviet Union considered its security was being threatened it seemed more appropriate for them to tell me what they had in mind. I would then tell them whether in my judgment as a private citizen it was within the realm of the conceivable, and where I did not know, I would say so. General Talensky then gave another long statement about the suffering of the Soviet Union in World War II, the gist of which was that it was imperative to obtain a recognition of Germany's Eastern frontier. I asked whether they connected the issue of the Eastern frontiers of Germany with the Berlin problem. Both of them said, "Yes." I replied that the Oder-Neisse frontier was probably a subject which could be usefully discussed.

Khvostov interjected whether my comment applied to the Czech-German border as well as the Polish-German border. I replied that I had never heard anyone question the Czech-German border. However, if the Soviet Union wanted to raise some doubt with respect to it by making an issue of it in negotiations, it would seem to me a subject about which the United States government would almost certainly be prepared to talk.

I then asked how they proposed to relate the border problem to the Berlin issue. Khvostov gave a long explanation of the Soviet position on Berlin, insisting that our access rights had never been questioned. All the Soviet Union wanted was to find a status appropriate to the present situation. In particular, the Soviet Union felt that our occupation rights were a weak basis even though no one was questioning their validity. He repeated the last statement and said emphatically that no one in the Soviet Union was questioning the validity of our occupation rights. However, people were puzzled why we insisted on a legal basis that was being outstripped by events. (He used the German word here: "verjaehrt.")

I said that I could not believe that Mr. Khruschev had awakened one morning and decided that the Western position in Berlin had an inadequate legal foundation and that he was therefore going to bring the world to the brink of war in order to improve our position. The Soviet group, which had meanwhile been joined by Sissakyan, laughed about this and Talensky said: "Of course not, we are trying to get something too. We are trying to get the stability of the East German frontier."

I asked how they would visualize connecting the problem of the frontier with guarantees of access in Berlin. At first Talensky said that the only realistic procedure was for the United States to sign a German peace treaty. I decided to see how far I could press them and said that was absolutely out of the question. They then asked whether I thought signing a separate protocol which would be attached to their own peace treaty would be acceptable. This, they explained, would mean that we would not sign the same document as Ulbricht. I said that this too seemed to me out of the question.

They then asked whether I thought it possible that we would make an agreement with the Soviet Union in which they would guarantee access to Berlin in return for our guarantee of Germany's Eastern frontiers. The access guarantees to Berlin could then be made part of a peace treaty which the Soviet Union would sign separately with the GDR.

I asked whether they had in mind something like the Bors-Zorin agreements of 1955. Talensky replied this seemed a useful model. (I am not sure the others knew what this agreement was.) I said that while I could not know what the United States government might think, my personal view was that such a proposal could well be the subject of negotiation.

We then turned to the question of the status of Berlin. Talensky acted as spokesman for the Soviet group and proposed a status very similar to that of the Soviet position at the 1959 foreign ministers' conference: a free city guaranteed by the four victors, with Soviet troops joining those of the West to guarantee the new status. I told him that in the light of what had gone before, I was disappointed at his lack of realism. He should know that such a proposal was totally unacceptable to us.

Khvostov intervened to ask whether this objection applied even to token Soviet forces in West Berlin. I said yes. Soviet forces in West Berlin were likely to magnify a feeling of insecurity. Khvostov replied that the Soviet Union was not too interested in having its own forces in West Berlin. They were more concerned about obtaining some limitations on the size of the Western forces and about a promise not to station nuclear weapons there. I said that as a military expert I was only interested in a force in West Berlin of sufficient size so that it could not easily be overrun. As for nuclear weapons, Berlin was an unlikely place to station them.

Khvostov asked how I felt about United Nations forces in West Berlin. I said my personal opinion was that it would be unwise to create a status for West Berlin that left too much confusion as to who was responsible for its security. I saw no particularly useful function

for United Nations troops except for a very small token force to supplement, but not replace, those of the West.

Talensky asked whether I thought it necessary for West Berlin to be part of the Federal Republic. I said it was not necessary for it to be part of the Federal Republic politically, but it would have to be part of the same economic and currency system. Any proposal to the contrary would be unacceptable. Khvostov said in English "that's alright."

Talensky said that a proposal along the lines of what we suggested would be a bitter pill for Ulbricht to swallow. He asked whether we could not sweeten the pill somewhat by agreeing to engage in some kind of technical negotiations with Ulbricht. I said my sympathy for Ulbricht's plight was extremely limited. It seemed to me that he was their problem and not ours. All the Russians laughed at this point and Khvostov said, "Yes, this is true; he is our problem." He repeated whether we could not engage in some technical negotiations with Ulbricht nevertheless. I asked what was meant by this term.

Talensky said this meant some business-like negotiations which did not imply diplomatic recognition. After all, we were dealing with Franco too, even though we did not like him. I ignored the last remark and said that many of our difficulties in dealing with Ulbricht would be lessened if the Soviet Union would declare him their agent. For example, if the Soviet Union guaranteed access rights, if it made itself finally responsible for these rights and if the East Germans were declared agents for the execution of these rights, I could conceive personally that we would consider letting East German troops exercise the same procedures on the access routes as are now exercised by Soviet troops. Talensky indicated that this might prove to be a possible basis for discussion from the Soviet point of view.

I then told Talensky that I had been impressed at the sessions at how often the American and Soviet delegates had misunderstood what they had just discussed. In order to avoid this problem, I would appreciate it if Talensky would summarize the conditions which he thought might supply the basis for agreement. He did so, as follows:

- (1) Recognition by the West that the Eastern frontiers of Germany were final.
- (2) A guarantee by the Soviet Union of our access rights to Berlin and of some status for Berlin which would be protected by the present three Western occupation powers.
- (3) The signature of a peace treaty between the USSR and East Germany in which these access rights would be specifically guaranteed.
- (4) The carrying out of access procedures by the East Germans as agents of the Soviet Union.

Khvostov concurred and asked whether I wanted to add anything. I repeated that I was speaking as a private citizen. In this capacity, one thought had occurred to me. It seemed to me that since the Soviet Union was the party desirous of changing the status quo it would not be proper for us to make a proposal along the lines indicated by Talensky. Rather, the right course was for the Soviet Union to indicate its willingness to accept such a scheme. This, I pointed out, seemed to me all the more necessary as the danger existed that if we made an offer along the lines outlined by Talensky, the Soviet Union might simply bank the guarantee of Germany's Eastern frontier as a unilateral concession without slackening the pressure on Berlin.

Talensky said that I was a very suspicious man. I replied that one very useful part of the Stowe conference had been the admission by the Soviet delegation that disarmament negotiations had to take into account the existing distrust. Khvostov at that point said they would like to think the last point over.

Saturday morning, September 16, after the last plenary session and just before the Soviet delegates had to board a bus for the airport, Tamm and Khvostov took me aside. Tamm this time was the spokesman and said he wanted to explore two things about my conversation with his colleagues: first, whether I was really adamant about having no Soviet troops in West Berlin. I said that if the Soviet Union was really interested in stability in Berlin, it should not insist on Soviet troops in West Berlin. The best basis for insuring the freedom of Berlin was by forces from the West.

Tamm then asked whether the occupation status was equally essential. I replied that our irreducible condition was the freedom of Berlin as we understood that term. If they could think of a status to guarantee this freedom other than the occupation rights, it was up to the Soviet Union to propose it. However, it was important to get clear that we would not agree to a status which jeopardized the freedom of Berlin by a subterfuge.

Tamm asked whether a United Nations guarantee would be acceptable if our troops could stay there as United Nations agents. I said that it was very hard to answer such questions with so little time to think about them. It seemed clear, however, that we would not agree to a status which could be changed every year by a majority in the General Assembly. Tamm asked how about a guarantee for five years. I said that was too short. He then asked how about ten years. I replied that if this kept up I would suggest one hundred and fifty years and perhaps we could meet in the middle. He laughed and said we understood each other. I said, "I am not sure we do."

Tamm then said that a more important question on his mind was what I had meant by the phrase that the Soviet government should take the initiative in making the proposal his colleagues had discussed with me. What did I think of a letter by him to Pravda? I said that I did not know how such things were handled in the Soviet Union, but it would not seem to me proper for the American government to respond to a letter by a Soviet scientist, however distinguished. He then asked me what I thought of an article in Pravda. I said I was a student of diplomatic history, not of Soviet affairs. As such, it seemed to me that the best course was for a responsible official of the Soviet government to make a statement to which our government could then respond. I mentioned that Malik's reference in the United Nations which initiated the Korean truce talks appeared to me an appropriate model.

Khvostov, who had been silent throughout this discussion, said at this point that as a fellow historian he wanted to tell me that I had learned my lessons well. The Soviet group then had to rush for the bus, which was actually being held for them in order for them to complete this conversation.

Conclusions:

(1) Most of the above is rather self-explanatory. However, what may not be apparent from the conversation was my sense that the Soviet delegates seemed eager to avoid a showdown over Berlin. Though they began the conversation of each topic with the usual bluster and the usual threats, they subsided very quickly when I made it clear the official Soviet position would prove absolutely unacceptable. At least with this particular group, it proved helpful not to debate the logic of our case but simply to state our position as a fact.

(2) My overwhelming impression was that this particular group seemed much more interested in the recognition of Germany's frontiers than in the recognition of East Germany--even the de facto recognition of East Germany. It would seem to me that in any exploratory talks with Gromyko that this would be the most useful area to explore initially. Also, this group seemed more prepared to discuss the agent theory than I had previously assumed.

(3) This particular group seemed extremely eager to advance ideas for possible solutions themselves and proved ready to settle for much less than they stated originally on almost every issue.

(4) Of course, I do not know whom, if anybody, the Soviet group represents in a Soviet context.